

## MILITARY STOREKEEPER AT FRANKFORD, PENN.

JULY 21, 1842.

Laid upon the table.

Mr. J. T. STUART, from the Committee on Public Expenditures, made the following

### REPORT:

*The Committee on Public Expenditures respectfully report :*

That, in the discharge of the general duty assigned them, they have investigated several cases where offices which have been considered unnecessary, and on that account abolished or discontinued, have been re-established, and the expenses of the Government thereby increased. While the committee would by no means carry economy so far as to dispense with agents and officers necessary to protect the public property, and secure the public interest, they are opposed to maintaining such as are utterly useless, and can render no service to the Government.

From an examination of such papers as have been furnished the committee in the following case, they have been unable to arrive at the conclusion that the public interest required the office herein mentioned to be re-established, and of course the act by which it was discontinued merits the highest approval.

The committee cannot but remark that, as a general rule, the multiplication of officers and dependants upon the Government, and the consequent increase of patronage, should be looked upon by Congress and the people with a jealous eye, and especially of those offices and agencies which are to be filled by the President or heads of departments, independent of the Senate, whereby men wholly unfit for the stations to which they are appointed, and totally unqualified to perform the duties assigned to them, but who may happen to be the favorites and dependants of the Executive, or peradventure a relative, or near connexion of a relative, may be provided for, by bestowing upon them *comfortable sinecures*. Abuses and corruptions will creep into every form of government, let them be watched ever so closely; but when these abuses and corruptions shall have become so common as to excite no special notice, or be considered no cause of censure by the public, the door may as well be thrown wide open at once, and all checks to the corrupting power of the Executive removed, as utterly ineffectual and useless. One case of the kind alluded to above, which the committee have under examination, was that of the re-establishment of the office of military storekeeper at Frankford, near Philadelphia. The committee will give a brief history of this case, which will be more fully illustrated by the correspondence with the War Department which they submit herewith.

On the 19th of February, 1841, Captain George D. Ramsay, the commandant at the arsenal at Frankford, addressed the Department at Washington, and, after reciting that he had learned that the then storekeeper at that arsenal was about to tender his resignation, he says: "I therefore deem it my duty to say to you that, under its present organization, I deem the situation of storekeeper to this arsenal *entirely unnecessary*." The storekeeper did not resign, as was anticipated in the letter above alluded to, but on the 13th of April, 1841, that officer was dismissed by Mr. Bell. The vacancy thus created, Mr. Bell, while Secretary of War, declined to fill, for the reasons given by him in his letter to J. H. Offley, Esq., dated May 12, 1841. He says: "Having been informed by the officer in command of the Frankford arsenal, approved by the Colonel of Ordnance, that the duties of military storekeeper and paymaster at that station can be as well performed by the officer of ordnance who is necessarily stationed there, the *Department* would not be fulfilling its *duty* to the public, of retrenching all *unnecessary expenditure*, were it now to fill the vacancy made by the removal of the late incumbent." Upon the recommendation of the officer in command of the arsenal at Frankford, *approved by the Colonel of Ordnance* at Washington, the office of storekeeper at that arsenal was discontinued by Mr. Bell, the Secretary of War.

On the 18th of November, 1841, the office of military storekeeper at Frankford *was renewed*, and Thomas A. Cooper (the father-in-law of a son of the President) was appointed to fill that office, as will be seen by the letter of Mr. Spencer, Secretary of War, of that date, addressed to him. The office was discontinued upon the ground that it was not necessary to the public service, and no sufficient reason being assigned for its renewal, the committee are constrained to believe that the office held by Mr. Cooper is a *sinecure*, and that the salary which he receives, equal to the pay of a captain of infantry, is wrongfully taken from the pockets of the people.

In regard to the other cases alluded to, the committee are under the necessity of postponing their report upon them, for the want of additional information, deemed important, and some time since called for, but not yet received.

The subjoined correspondence, in relation to the abolishment and re-establishment of the office of military storekeeper at Frankford, and the appointment of Thomas A. Cooper as military storekeeper, is submitted, as presenting a complete history of the case, and the reasons assigned by the Secretary of War for the course he has pursued.

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WAR DEPARTMENT, *March 12, 1842.*

SIR: I received, yesterday, your note of the 10th instant, transmitting a resolution of the Committee on Public Expenditures, requesting to be furnished "with copies of all the correspondence which has taken place, since the 4th of March, 1841, between the Department and agents of the Government or individuals, in relation to the office of military storekeeper at Frankford."

In compliance with the resolution, I now transmit copies of the following papers:

1. A letter from the Secretary of War, dated April 13, 1841, to A. L.

Roumfort, dismissing him from the office of military storekeeper and paymaster at Frankford.

2. A letter from the Secretary of War, dated May 12, 1841, to John H. Offley, assigning the reasons for then declining to fill the vacancy made by the removal of the late incumbent of the office of military storekeeper at Frankford.

3. A letter from the Secretary of War, dated November 18, 1841, to Thomas A. Cooper, announcing his appointment as military storekeeper at Frankford.

4. A letter of the Secretary of War, dated March 2, 1842, to the honorable W. L. Goggin, a member of the Military Committee of the House, in answer to inquiries made by him, respecting orders to discontinue any offices of military storekeeper.

Although the last-mentioned paper does not relate exclusively to the Frankford arsenal, yet that arsenal is included in the general view taken of the matter, and is equally subject to the principles therein stated as governing the establishment of those officers at the different armories, arsenals, and depots.

It may be supposed that there is an incongruity between the statement in that letter, that no orders discontinuing the offices of military storekeepers could be found than those enumerated, of April 23, 1841, and January 11, 1842, and the letter of Mr. Bell to J. H. Offley, of May 12, 1841. The Ordnance office was called upon by me to report, in the terms of Mr. Goggin's inquiry, "whether there was any order on file or on record, since November, 1839, by which any of the offices of military storekeepers had been discontinued;" upon which the chief of the office reported the above-mentioned order of April 23, 1841, set forth in the letter to Mr. Goggin, conceiving, very properly as I think, that the letter to Mr. Offley was not an order discontinuing the office, but expressive of a determination to which Mr. Bell had arrived in his own mind. As an order, it should, and doubtless would, have been communicated to the Ordnance office, in the same form and manner as the order of April 23, 1841. It is proper also to remark, that the letter to Mr. Offley was not known to me at the time of Mr. Cooper's appointment, and that, if it had been, it would not have been regarded as decisive of the matter.

Your obedient servant,

J. C. SPENCER.

Hon. A. L. LINN,

*Chairman Committee on Public Expenditures, Ho. of Reps.*

No. 1.

DEPARTMENT OF WAR, *April 13, 1841.*

SIR: I have to inform you that your services as military storekeeper and paymaster in the service of the United States are no longer required, and that they will cease on the receipt of this letter.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN BELL.

A. L. ROUMFORT, Esq.,

*Frankford Arsenal, Frankford, Pa.*

No. 2.

DEPARTMENT OF WAR, *May 12, 1841.*

SIR: Having been informed by the officer in command of the Frankford arsenal, approved by the Colonel of Ordnance, that the duties of military storekeeper and paymaster at that station can be as well performed by the officer of ordnance who is necessarily stationed there, the Department would not be fulfilling its duty to the public, of retrenching all unnecessary expenditures, were it now to fill the vacancy made by the removal of the late incumbent.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN BELL.

J. H. OFFLEY, Esq., *Washington City.*

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FRANKFORD ARSENAL, *February 19, 1841.*

COLONEL: It being generally understood that the storekeeper at this arsenal has tendered his resignation, there will be, *as I learn*, many applicants for the situation. I therefore deem it my duty to say to you, that, under its present organization, I deem the situation of storekeeper to this arsenal as entirely unnecessary. I do not mean this letter as official, unless you desire it; nor do I deem it necessary to enter into details, under the impression that the reasons on which my opinion is predicated must be apparent to you.

I am, Colonel, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

GEORGE D. RAMSAY,

*Captain of Ordnance.*

Colonel GEORGE BOMFORD,  
*Washington.*

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No. 3.

DEPARTMENT OF WAR, *November 18, 1841.*

SIR: You are hereby informed that the President of the United States has appointed you a military storekeeper in the Ordnance department, in the service of the United States, with the pay and emoluments of a captain of infantry, the appointment to take effect on the day of your acceptance.

You will immediately, on receipt hereof, please to communicate to this Department your acceptance or non-acceptance of said appointment; and, in case of acceptance, you will report by letter to the Colonel of Ordnance at Washington, for orders and instructions.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. C. SPENCER.

THOMAS A. COOPER, Esq.,  
*Bristol, Pennsylvania.*

## No. 4.

DEPARTMENT OF WAR, *March 2, 1842.*

SIR: Your letter of the 18th ultimo, calling my attention to two notes from you of the 15th of January last, on file in the Ordnance office, and requesting answers to them, was received on the 21st ultimo. Some difficulty in obtaining accurate and full information on the subjects of your inquiry, and the pressure of calls from committees, or their members, of a prior date, have prevented an earlier answer.

One of your notes inquires whether there is any printed document or other paper which will afford the Committee on Military Affairs any information in regard to the proposition to abolish the office of superintendent of armories, and desiring any such to be communicated to you, as a member of the Military Committee.

There is no other printed document on the subject, and none that has any relation to it, within my knowledge, except the reports of my immediate predecessor, of May 31, 1841, communicated with the message of the President to Congress at the opening of the first session of the twenty-seventh Congress, and excepting what is said in relation to the same matter in the annual report from this Department transmitted to Congress at the opening of the present session. At the time of the receipt of your letter, there was no "other paper," on file in this Department, bearing on the subject of superintendent of armories, except the report of the board organized by my immediate predecessor to inquire into the condition of the Springfield armory, and a report of his inspection of that armory, by the lieutenant colonel of ordnance. A copy of the former was communicated to the Military Committee on the 25th day of January last; a copy of the latter is herewith transmitted. Since the receipt of your letter, and within a few days, a report has been received from a board of officers directed to inquire particularly into the condition of the armory at Harper's Ferry. It is of some length, but a copy of that portion relating to the subject of your inquiry is herewith transmitted.

The other note to Colonel Bomford, referred to by you, states that you "have in your hands a copy of a letter to the Secretary of War, signed by Colonel Talcott, dated November 15, 1839, containing a project for some amelioration of the Ordnance department;" and you inquire "whether any of the offices of military storekeepers have been discontinued since the date of the letter aforesaid—if so, when and where? and whether, after being discontinued, the office has again been revived?"

No evidence of any office of military storekeeper having been discontinued since the date of Lieutenant Colonel Talcott's letter can be found in this Department, except that on the 23d of April, 1841, the Secretary of War gave directions to the Ordnance bureau, that military storekeepers were unnecessary at the following points: Little Rock, Arkansas; Fayetteville, Arkansas; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and St. Louis arsenal—and that, on the 6th of January last, directions were given to remove the few stores at Memphis, and discontinue the office of storekeeper at that place.

On the 17th of March, 1841, the Department decided against making an appointment of a storekeeper in the quartermaster's department at Pittsburg.

Since the dates referred to by you, seven military storekeepers, viz: those at New York, Springfield armory, Frankford, North Carolina arse-



nal, Memphis depot, Little Rock, and Baton Rouge, have been dismissed the service, and others appointed in their places, except that at Baton Rouge no officer of that description is at present employed. The appointment of a storekeeper at the North Carolina arsenal was made on the 1st of April, 1841. Besides those changes, storekeepers have been appointed at Rock Island, Illinois, at Appalachicola arsenal, and at Pikesville; the storekeeper at St. Louis, Missouri, has been transferred to Liberty, in the same State; and the storekeeper at Mount Vernon, Alabama, was, on the 20th of September, 1841, ordered to be transferred to Little Rock, Arkansas; and S. H. Bogart has resigned.

It is proper to remark that, at the armories, and at most of the arsenals and depots, one or more officers of the ordnance corps are stationed, whose province it is to superintend the preparation of cartridges, rockets, and other fixed ammunition, and the making of gun carriages, and the repairs of arms and military equipments. They do not necessarily take charge of the military stores, although sometimes it is convenient to devolve that duty upon them. The employment of storekeepers for that purpose, and who are also frequently required to act as paymasters, depends entirely upon circumstances existing at the time.

Notwithstanding the opinion expressed by the ordnance officers, it is with me a matter of great doubt whether the interest of the Government is not better promoted by having a person of mature age permanently in charge of the military stores, instead of placing them in the care of officers, many of whom must necessarily be young, and who are liable to be called on other duty, and to be stationed from one station to another. A better knowledge of the condition of the stores, and more care in their preservation, and in the repairs of the buildings, may ordinarily be expected, while a more rigid supervision and accountability will be preserved, from having an officer of ordnance to oversee the storekeepers, instead of mingling their duties with those that peculiarly belong to him. In point of expense, it can ultimately make little difference to the Government, because the assigning the duties of storekeepers to officers of ordnance will render it necessary to increase the force of that corps. Indeed, such was the proposition of Lieutenant Colonel Talcott, in the letter referred to by you. At all events, until an increase in the ordnance corps shall be authorized by Congress, the military storekeepers cannot be dispensed with.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. C. SPENCER.

Hon. WM. L. GOGGIN,

*Committee on Military Affairs, Ho. of Reps.*



